

perjury was not committed when the parties were asked if they knew of any legal impediment. He stated this to demonstrate that those supposed cases of violating the law by contracting such marriages were exclusively rare, though, were the fact otherwise, it ought to have no weight. There was another view which might, perhaps, have had a great deal of influence with many. He was told that in advocating his views he was setting up his private judgment against the word of God. But when they came to the point, it appeared there was quite as much of private judgment and just as little of the expressed word of God on the one side as on the other. The simple point was, there was a tacit, not an expressed permission. Neither the permission nor the prohibition was expressed; but there was a great difference between the two as far as implication was concerned. The prohibition was in perfect agreement with the whole context, while the presumed permission was perfectly contrary to it, and depended upon the most improbable supposition and the most strained interpretation. Yet the one was said to depend upon the word of God, and the other simply upon a human judgment. If they looked simply at the merits of the question, making the truth their great object—if they cast aside all their party considerations and regarded rather authority than numbers as to the opinions of those who were on the adverse side—if they were not swayed by any corrupt or improper motive—if they refused to be blinded by sophistry or dogmatism, and if they kept well together, then there need be no doubt or anxiety as to the result. He lamented that such an association as the present had not been formed many years ago, for if it had, the question would have been in a very different position. The Church had been asleep on this question, while her enemies had been wide awake and busy, sowing the tares. He trusted that he might say that the Church was now awakening to the magnitude of the danger, and he would call on all present to circulate petitions amongst those who might be willing to sign, in order to meet that false and spurious exhibition of public opinion which had imposed on the credulity of many both in and out of Parliament, by a genuine, real, and powerful exhibition. (Applause.)

Mr. J. C. COLQUHOUN seconded the resolution. Referring to the remark of Vice-Chancellor Pigo Wood that it was only in the West Riding of York that there was any desire on the part of the poor in favour of a change in the law, he assured the meeting that that district was not altogether tainted. He had received from ladies in the West Riding communications expressing their sympathy in the movement of this society, and recommending more active exertions against the agitation now going on for an alteration of the law. The question was one of such social interest both to man and woman that he did not wonder at its stirring up the heart of England, for it was the purity of female life in this country which was the basis of all our greatness. The purity of our married life consisted in this, that man and wife, following, however imperfectly, the Scriptural law, became, in our happy homes in England, one in interest, one in sympathy, and one in feeling. They felt that God had drawn around them a circle which separated them, indeed from the world without, but within which there was intimacy and confidence, and the husband felt that he had taken to himself by his connection the brotherhood and sisterhood of his wife, and the wife felt that she had taken to herself the brotherhood and sisterhood of her husband. It was true that by the providence of God this blessed relation by the death of one of the parties might be dissolved; but the ties which were formed were indissoluble—the circle of blood which was thus drawn was drawn by the Great Creator of man, and it was a circle which spread wherever man was found, whether shivering at the North Pole, or basking in the sunlight of the tropics. Every where there was the same magic and blessed circle, which created new hopes, new ties, new sympathies, new joys, and new affinities; and the husband taking to himself these affinities, and the wife taking to herself these affinities, they became one with an extended sisterhood and with an extended brotherhood in the deepest and most intimate confidence. Death might remove one of the parties, but death did not dissolve these ties. It did not make her who was called a sister yesterday less a sister because she was bereaved. It did not make him who was called a brother yesterday less a brother. From the moment of marriage they stood in a new and blessed relation, having contracted ties formed upon earth, but resting in the heavens—indissoluble ties, which no human act should dissolve. It had been said that there had been made increasing majorities in one House of Parliament and decreasing majorities in the other. But this was not a question to be settled by majorities of men, but by the fiat of him who made man. Passing by the vain and futile judgments of man, he appealed to that enduring law which was written by God in every heart. When a man was widowed by an act of Providence, and bereaved of the partner of his life, the blessed providence of God allowed him to take unto himself another. But he must refrain from entering that circle of blood which had been drawn not by human dictate but by the Divine law. If it should be said "Here is an Act of Parliament which gives a licence to encroach within that circle"—but he trusted that would never be the case—nature would recoil, for God, who is above all Acts of Parliament, had prescribed a law which man dare not defile. Therefore, passing through the shifting pageantry of time, and turning his back on the future majorities of Parliament, he would appeal to those eternal counsels which were written

in the heart of man, and would say—Men and women of England, if you value the purity of an English home, if you love and cherish the sanctity of the family hearth, keep entire that circle which God has traced by his divine finger, within which is love, and peace, and purity, and the joyous confidence of trusted hearts; but within which, if you ever introduce the serpent tongue of this fatal measure, which will create distrust instead of confidence, and infuse poison instead of confidence, then woo to English homes, and sadness to many a mourning heart.

Mr. KER SKYMON, M.P., in supporting the resolution, remarked that although the bill more than once passed the House of Commons, it was always in a comparatively thin house, and if a true canvas could now be made of the members of the Lower House, he did not believe that a majority would vote in its favour. The House of Commons was led away a great deal by claptrap, particularly with regard to this question. When certain persons wished to do any thing, the interests of the poor were always put forward, but he believed that nothing would have been heard on this subject if the poor only had been interested in the question. The poor did not keep offices in Parliament-Street, or advertise extensively in the *Times*, or send lawyers' clerks all over the country, to agitate the question and get signatures to petitions. Who the people were who kept the offices in Parliament-street, advertised in the *Times*, and sent these lawyer's clerks about, he did not know, for their names were not put forward, but he strongly suspected that they were some of those rich persons of whom they had heard, who, having broken the law, were anxious to alter it, in order to cover their illegal acts. Another piece of claptrap was the talk about the disconsolate widower being so deeply attached to his wife, that he was anxious to marry her sister, in order that she might take care of his children; but he believed it was much less the children of the first marriage that were thought of in these cases, than the anticipated issue of the second.

Mr. A. J. B. BENEFSON-HORS moved—"That this meeting considers the Marriage Law Defence Association worthy of the support of all persons desirous of opposing the threatened change in the matrimonial law." He observed that the mayor and corporation influence, to which the right reverend alluded, he himself was a sufferer from. He owed to that, in fact, his exclusion from the Parliament in 1852. He received a notice that in consequence of his vote upon the bill for legalising these marriages he would not be returned. He replied that he was very sorry for it, but he entertained a conscientious view upon the question, and all he could say was, "Good morning to you, gentlemen." From his own experience, he knew how the screw was put upon members of Parliament upon this question. Those members who had any selfish motive to gratify—those who desired to oblige the mayors, town clerks, and beer-house keepers, found it convenient to come down on the Wednesdays, when, as there was always a thin house on these days, the question was invariably brought on, and vote for the bill; and this was the way in which it had hitherto been carried. He knew that feeling of delicacy which prevented the opening of this question in a public meeting, but after all it was a most important question—it was the question of the women of England, of the wives and daughters of England, who, with the natural delicacy of their minds, shrank from any thing like public discussion on the subject. This the enemy knew and relied upon, and it was a striking instance of might overruling right. He altogether denied that it was the poor man's question, and of this they had the best evidence in the report of the commissioners. Their statistics showed that of the marriages which took place, or were known to have been prevented by the state of the law, between persons within the prohibited degrees, up to 1848 there were 1,848, of which 196 occurred before the act of 1836; since then there had been 1,364, and 88 had been prevented. Of these 1,648 marriages, 1,608 were amongst the higher and middle classes, and 40 only amongst the lower. And yet, with these statistics before them these people who agitated the question had the brazen effrontery to come forward and call that clean which God had pronounced unclean, and call that holy which God had denounced as unholy; and, as they said, all for the sake of these poor men who in their soul's soul they knew were not the sufferers from the existing state of the law, but really for the sake of those men who were rich enough to bid defiance to the law, and wealthy enough to endeavour to alter it for their own purposes.

The Rev. DANIEL MOORE seconded the resolution, and from his own experience stated that the proposed alteration of the law was not desired, nor could it be a boon to the poor, for in poor families it was impossible for the wife's sister to be placed in the position of guardian to her sister's children, because as soon as the daughters in poor families were marriageable, they were married, or employed as servants. The resolution was agreed to.

Dr. JELF, in moving a vote of thanks to the Chairman, could state from a long acquaintance with Germany, that the people of the better class in that country were surprised that the people of England should be agitating for permission to contract these prohibited marriages, which in the case of their own country had been attended with the most pernicious consequences.

The DEAN OF WESTMINSTER seconded the resolution, which was carried by acclamation, the Bishop of St. David pronounced the Benediction, and the meeting then separated.